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An Essay

On The

Physiognomy of Disease.

With some Prefatory Remarks on review

of

Physiognomy as a Science.

By

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of Georgia

To the Faculty

of the

University of Pennsylvania

An Essay &c.

From the historical deduction of the origin & progress of Physiognomy, it appears, that although the Science has fallen into disrepute, there can scarcely be mentioned a period, in which any cultivation of science took place, when it was not likewise the study & sometimes even the profession, of men of the most eminent abilities & the greatest learning.

Physiognomy is variously defined both in ancient & modern writings, & in the Berlin transactions for the years 69 & 70, there appears a long controversial discussion on the subject, between two authors of some note - the one contending, that "All knowledge whatsoever is Physiognomy" the other confining it to the human face, these as in most instances neither have hit the medium of truth.

It does not appear that the Ancients extended the Compass of Physiognomy beyond man, or at least animated na-

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time. but the study being revived in the middle ages. those who treated on the subject, incited probably by a prevalent taste for the marvellous, or misled by the comprehensiveness of the etymological meaning of the word, widened the range of speculation far beyond the ancient limits & hence the, "Physiognomy of the Plants &c.; those naturalists who admitted the doctrine of signatures, universally adopted this extensive signification, & Boyle too, is found formally to subscribe to it. It would be extending this part of our subject however to a disproportionate length, & at the same time be foreign to the object in view, were we to consider the plausibility of these different definitions, or of others that might be cited, it is merely intended in a few introductory remarks to enquire into the importance Physiognomy has held in the annals of learning & into the probable causes of its falling into disrepute.

Before the era of Pythagoras, a celebrated philosopher of antiquity, the Greeks had little or no science, Physiognomy had been cultivated in Egypt & India, & it is probable, that from these countries 'the Sage of Samos' introduced

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the rudiments of this science, as he did those of many oth
ers generally deemed more important into Greece; it soon
attracted notice, (and as we have before observed) contin
ued to engage the attention of many of the greatest phi
losophers of their respective ages. In the time of Socrates
it is said to have been adopted as a profession – the subject
is mentioned by Plato, & by Aristotle it is formerly treated
of in a book allotted to the purpose. In several of the
classic authors many physiognomical observations occur
in Cicero & Sallust (for instance) in Pliny Plutarch. & others.

Cicero it is well known was peculiarly attached to
the science, & in his oration against Piso is a curious in
stance, where the Orator employs Physiognomy to pur
poses of abuse.

That in the Roman Empire it was practised as
a profession, ample evidence appears in the writings of
the several authors just mentioned, but it fell with
the Empire at its overthrow by the northern barbarians,
& all the other sciences then existing in the empire shared
the same fate; about the beginning of the 16th Century it

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began again to be noticed & from that time till the close of the 17th Century, it is said to have been one of the most fashionable studies, & within that time have appeared almost all the approved authors on the subject; Lavater's Work particularly which excited much attention & but for the weight of prejudice against the study, might have replaced it in that rank in the circle of Sciences to which it has some just claims.

Physiognomy has fallen into disrepute, because it has been treated of in conjunction with subjects now deservedly exploded — from being cotemporary in the annals of Literature with, Magic, Alchemy, Judicial Astrology, & other fanciful studies, & from the injudicious arguments & assertions of those who have undertaken its defence. Many of its advocates held it to be connected with doctrines long since sunk into oblivion; Lavater, to whom we have alluded & who is the most prominent & consistent author since the days of Aristotle — notwithstanding he rejected the manner of writing pursued by former Physiognomists, fell into a like error with his fac

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therefore his imagination has frequently so far outstripped his judgment, that an ordinary reader would be apt to reject the whole system, as the extravagant reverie of an ingenious theorist. throughout his whole work he is led away by a high impassioned tone of enthusiasm, which is very opposite to the cool & patient investigation becoming a philosopher & which puts his readers on their guard against a too implicit acquiescence in his decisions.

The arguments against Physiognomy as a science founded in truth, are indeed strong & apparently irrefutable. one of the most forcible is the following. "The human frame" says Formey "is liable to innumerable accidents by which it may be changed in its external appearances, without any correspondent change in the disposition & requires skill beyond that of mortals to distinguish the modifications of features, that are natural, from those that may be accidental." these objections are plausible but not conclusive, the use of any thing ought not to be rejected merely because it is capable of abuse: & although we have discovered

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many of the ancient systems to be merely creatures of imagination, still we should not decide too hastily & reject not knowledge merely because it would be too tedious or troublesome to acquire, or because it was treated of in conjunction, or contemporary with subjects of a fanciful & ideal nature.

Of the truth of the science to a certain degree there cannot exist a doubt, every countenance, every form, every created existence is individually distinct – no one being in nature is precisely similar to another – no two minds perfectly resemble each other – this proposition so far as regards man is the foundation stone of Physiognomy.

It is impossible to resist the conclusion that betwe the mind & countenance there is a determinate relation, – that there is a certain native analogy between the internal faculties of the one, & the external faculties of the other – a person boiling with anger has a threatening air on his countenance, which the most heedless observer never mistakes. & he who is mourning under some severe trial, wears a very different cast of features from him

who is happy in the prospect of some anticipated event. The sympathy between the mind & body is equally remarkable, they reciprocally affect each other, as "in intoxication & mania" observes Aristotle "the mind exhibits the affections of the body, & in fear joy &c the body displays the affections of the mind" the health of the one is almost necessary to that of the other. But, whatever may be the doubts & speculations which encumber the study of the physiognomy of man in a natural & healthy state, they are in a great measure removed in our decisions upon his condition when affected by disease, the means of ascertaining the existence of which & in most particular form & their probable termination, we may term,

Medical Physiognomy

Or, the physiognomy of disease, which denotes such signs as being taken from the countenance, tongue, breath, respiration, sensation, expectoration, the excrements, the temperature & appearance of the extremities and the skin generally — serve to indicate the state of the ~~state of the~~ system when affected by morbid impressions. In enquiry into the causes which tended to

produce this derangement affords the physician a strong hold upon which to ground his judgment similar causes produce similar effects & particular causes are liable to produce particular diseases.

Certain constitutions also predispose to certain complaints - this proposition involves the doctrine of the disposition of the solids & fluids of the human body rendering the system according to their proportion strong, weak &c

In every person there are appearances of a temperament peculiar to himself, though from more minute observation, & perhaps from the theory of the four humours or cardinal qualities, they have been deduced as many temperaments, viz the Sanguineous, Bilious, Phlegmatic & melancholic, all of which are said to be marked by external characteristics easily distinguished - the two however that are most distinct, are the sanguineous & melancholic or the temperaments of youth & age; in the one there is a laxity of solids, a redundancy of fluids, a large arterial system, irrudulently from the plethora &c disposing to diseases of an inflammatory nature as Hemorrhages, fevers &c but

which arising from a lax system are more easily cured. In the other there is a rigidity of solids, a small proportion of the fluids, small arteries & large veins (hence the turgescence of these) with great irritability. Eg: Hæmorrhoids, Nervous diseases, obstructions of the viscera, Dropsies &c are the consequences of this temperament.

The Countenance is an index of very considerable accuracy to the experienced physician in determining the case of his patient, thus an overall discovers the existence of much he may ascertain from its particular change & appearance. The pale countenance of Anæsthetic Pulmonalis is familiar to every one. Jaundice is distinguished by its yellow coat, morose expression of countenance, arising from a numbness of the intellectual faculties incident to this complaint. Dropsy, the Exanthemata, Intermittent fevers some of the affections of the Digestive system may also be distinguished by the countenance.

When the features are greatly distorted or changed from their natural & healthy aspect, more or less danger is to be apprehended, as a return of the natural counte

nance is invariably a sign of returning health. The appearance of the eyes is an indication of considerable importance occasionally - a sparkling ardent eye is the precursor of delirium - an anxious wandering eye with the ball turned upwards, warns us of the approach of convulsions, which may be usherred in rendered less violent - sleeping with the eyes only partially closed, is symptomatic of a diseased alimentary canal, with children it is the consequence of violent purging, it is not so alarming. A preternatural dilatation of the pupil is said to be indicative of compressed brain, & a preternatural contraction - a prominent symptom of Phrenitis.

Yellow eyes with involuntary weeping, sunken temples, a leaden or livid colour of the face, a contracted frowning brow, the skin about the forehead hard and dry, the face polished or apparently glazed, the lips hanging, relaxed, & cold, are conditions of the countenance, which occurring in any form of disease, are very generally the preludes of death.

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information to the enquiring practitioner, he consults it also, & according to its dictates in a great measure is he influenced in his judgment & plan of treatment.

It was said by Hippocrates to assume the colour of the prevailing humour, hence the yellow or green tongue from redundancy of bile, & might be added the pale yellow or white tongue, corresponding with the very appearance of the blood drawn from the system under inflammatory action.

Bilious & Intermittent fevers are always attended with a foul encrusted tongue - in Febrile fever from an abscess in the lungs or elsewhere, the tongue is perfectly clean & florid, this form of fever includes very much of the nature & type of Intermittent, chills, exacerbations of heat perspiration, are common to both but they may easily be distinguished by attending to the peculiarities of the tongue in each just mentioned.

By the same means we may generally distinguish the complaints of the pulmonary organs from those of the prima viæ; in diseases of the lungs the tongue continues

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clean & is sometimes even more so than natural. The contrary is the case when the fluids are deranged. By its appearance it exhibits also very correctly, the state of the digestive system. — A black, dark or chocolate tongue, tremors & protrusion of the tongue, are symptoms of the utmost danger & a natural tongue in pestilential fevers is said to be indicative of immediate dissolution.

The Teeth afford no very important indication in diseases: in fevers from common causes they are not materially affected. "dark fetid sordes upon the teeth" says Caldwell "is a distinguishing symptom of Typhus Gravior." They are also symptomatic of a disturbed Chylopoietic viscera, the teeth however from various accidents may be changed from their natural appearance & mislead us in our judgment.

Grating or grinding of the teeth is an unpleasant sign, in children it is indicative of the presence of worms & often precedes delirium.

Teething is a very fruitful cause of disease with children & an examination of their condition will often unfold to us the cause which must first be removed to perfect a cure.

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All unnatural Respiration is unfavorable. It proceeds from pain in some part; when laborious with an undulating motion of the pectoral or abdominal muscles, raising of the shoulders when it is hurried, or very slow, with considerable intermission, or when the inspiration is sudden & distinct, & the expiration scarcely perceptible, there is but a little hope of a favorable termination.

Unequal respiration is symptomatic of a want of action in the pulmonary vessels, & difficult passage of the blood through the lungs, causing thereby an imperfect decarbonization which is attended with no inconsiderable danger.

In inflammation of the lungs & pleura the breathing is small & frequent; hence the ability in the part of the patient to make a full respiration is considered indicative of an abatement, or the subsidence of inflammatory action.

Hiccough, or a spasmodic affection of the diaphragm frequently interrupting respiration in advanced stages of acute diseases, is a symptom of bad import, it arises from irritation produced by acidity in the stomach, & occurring in diseases in which this organ is implicated, it is an alarming sign.

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In the last stage of Typhus Fever, it is a symptom which very generally seals the doom of the sufferer — instances however are recorded of recovery after its appearance in this Complaint —

Perspiration, when general, accompanied with warmth of the surface, softness of the skin, free respiration, abatement of restlessness, heat, & thirst, is in all diseases of an acute nature a symptom of very favourable import — occurring spontaneously in complaints usually requiring diaphoretic medicines, it is a good sign — In Catarrh & most of the pulmonary affections, a continued moisture indicates a disposition in them to yield —

Cold clammy sweats particularly on the forehead with a hard pallid skin & cold extremities are symptoms of the greatest danger.

The paroxysms of fever arising from some local irritation, are not relieved by perspiration & in malignant diseases it is ma auspicious circumstance. In acute diseases sweat particularly in the fevers of Southern climates a partial sweat with but little decrease of arterial action, portends an obstinate attack (if recurring in the commencement) and a

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doubtful result (if taking place in the advanced stages of the Complaint.

Expectoration, so far as regards the affections of the Respiratory system, affords us a prognostic of some utility. In Pneumonic Inflammation a difficulty in expectoration, or what has been called a dry cough is unfavourable, as the disease is seldom resolved without some evident evacuation. & says Cullen "the evacuation most frequently attending & seeming to have the greatest effect in promoting resolution, is expectoration, a loose free discharge, therefore, of mucus from the lungs, is indicative of their healthy condition.

A purulent expectoration is always alarming as it proceeds from an abscess in the lungs, which, from the action of these organs is almost irremediable.

A spitting of blood (unless it is very dark with difficult breathing) is not dangerous nor is it necessarily a pulmonary disease it is frequently the consequence of a faulty pulsation in the pulmonary vessels, or of some external violence which if not too excessive nature will in due time remedy. It affords us a correct diagnostic between the haemorrhage of the

lungs & stomach as in the one, the quantity discharged is small of a florid colour & mixed with a little frothy mucus only — in the other, the quantity is larger, the blood more dark and grumous & mixed with the other contents of the stomach. In Pleurisies, Peripneumonies & some fevers it often arises as the presage of a favourable issue.

The Excrements, (by which we mean only the Urine & alvine evacuations) would as some important suggestions in the treatment of those complaints, in which the functions of the urinary organs or alimentary canal are impaired. No secretion in the human body is so variable in respect to quality & quantity, as the urine & perhaps to this circumstance is owing in some measure the inexcusable neglect in practitioners of this indication, it is affected differently in different complaints (& a due observation of its colour, consistency & general properties in disease would unfold to us a valuable test), as in Pneumonia, a copious discharge of urine is unfavourable, in Rheumatism Gout & the Calculous affections it is a sign of convalescence — Strangury in the commencement of acute diseases is a bad omen.

in the advanced stages it is a very promising occurrence &
Dr. Blackall the urine was held in high estimation as
an indication in dropsy & by Asphyxiates & many, of the
older Physicians it was greatly confided in.

Any derangement in the digestive system may be detected in the alvine discharges. a preternatural secretion of bile is known by black lu bile stools, or of a dark green or yellow colour. In Jaundice the flow of bile into the duodenum is prevented, & the faces are of a pale white colour, hence we may conclude, that in ordinary cases the evacuation assuming this appearance indicates a deficiency of bile.

If the intestines become irritated from the action of any stimulus, the passages are thin, serous & if much inflamed - as in Dysentery the stools are slimy & mixed with blood -

In inverse peristaltic motion, with an intussusception some part of the intestinal tube are attendants of the Stercoraceous passion & vomiting of stercoraceous matter seldom meets with an arrest but in death.

* see Blackall on Dropsies -

Of the Extremities — Any unusual coldness of the body in advanced stages of acute disease is an unpleasant symptom — in the commencement of active complaints chills are very common & indicate no increase of danger unless they continue unusually long when they become a source of great apprehension

Cold extremities show a very feeble circulation & an engorgement of some of the great viscera which are productive of very fatal consequences — Cold wrists with warm nauseous an unequal temperature of the extremities, are signs of a high degree of danger.

Any unnatural motion of the extremities, as catching at objects apparently floating before the eyes — picking the nap from the bed clothes — lifting the bandages — the patient dancing his knees up to one side or turn he has upon his back & slides to the foot of the bed, are symptoms indicating a condition which most generally precludes the hope of recovery. "A lividness of the nails & fingers" says Chapman "is a fatal symptom when it takes place in the advanced stages of acute disease, marking a torpid

circulation & a defective oxygenation of the blood" says he "though the other circumstances of the case should indicate no danger this symptom will very generally prove the harbinger of death.

The pulse & the condition of the blood drawn at different periods of the complaint are hereby important in treating disease, & deserve to be carefully considered. we will here, on by observe that the pulse is influenced by a variety of causes independent of disease which should be recollected. & that the blood by its different degrees of coagulability, by its being viscid or otherwise, or by its being serous, light coloured, or dark & gravinous, leads to us correctly the state of the system.

The state of the mind also influences the practitioner in his hopes or fears for the welfare of his patient — a partial alienation of the mind, the patient speaking incoherently, & the deep sighing, or delirium of the low & muttering kind, are symptoms of very dangerous import.

A subsultus tendinum, particularly about the wrists & hands, or violent physical exertions about the crisis of any complaint with delirium, are signs foretelling a fatal conclusion.

Great insensibility in the advanced stages of disease is very alarming, but preternatural irritability not less so— the restoration of sensation and of reason with composure after delirium, a return of the appetite & a taste for the usual luxuries of life after a long confinement, are circumstances which animate the Physician & friends of the patient with a well grounded hope of a speedy recovery.——

——That errors do frequently occur in the judgment of the Physician & that considerable uncertainty attends him in his art is a lamentable truth, but this should not induce us to reject the doctrine of symptoms generally as sophistical & delusive, but rather to consider the system as not yet completed & be an incentive to strengthen our exertions to effect this end.— We believe, that in the further development of Medical science, by the successive eventuation of causes & events, & the attentive observance of circumstances preceding death, with post mortem examinations, the experienced practitioner will be able confidently to pronounce the case of his patient, & anticipate with tolerable certainty the fate that awaits him. There is no trait in the Medical Profession

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which so firmly establishes its virtue & dignity as a knowledge of the symptoms & general physiognomy of disease — like the skillful Mariner who watches the elements — foretells a storm & prepares his bark to have the fury of the winds. the attentive practitioner watches the indications of his patient & prepares his system to meet the change, he knows by particular circumstances of the case, to what particular organ to address his remedies, thereby avoiding the just censure of Empirical practice & securing to himself deserved preeminence

The writings of Hippocrates abound in Physiognomical remarks, the accuracy of which are scarcely surpassed in the present day — Cullen stands unrivalled in his detail of symptoms, & Galen, whose name is called in the annals of medicine, & whose talents so completely dazzled his Contemporaries & successors, that his opinions bore an almost undivided sway for several centuries, first gained the ascendancy of his colleagues by a correct prediction in opposition to them in the case of two Roman Princes —

~~He instances of his prophecy are well known & have made us correct it is necessary to allude the hopeless state, to complicated this, may indeed with the symptoms & the effect later, & is necessary which constitutes a leading feature of the Physiognomy of Disease~~

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